



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Fifth Disease (Human Parvovirus B19)

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is caused by the human parvovirus B19 and is a common, highly contagious illness. Fifth disease is most common among children, but adults can also become infected. Most people with fifth disease have only a mild illness. Fifth disease is not reportable in Indiana, so the number of cases that occur each year is unknown.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

Common symptoms of fifth disease include:

- Fever
- Runny nose
- Headache
- Rash

People who have fifth disease may develop a red rash on the face known as “slapped cheek” rash. This rash is more common in children than adults. People with fifth disease may also get a red rash on their chest, back, arms, legs, and buttocks. The rash may be itchy and may look lacey as it fades. The rash usually goes away in seven to ten days, but it can come and go for weeks, especially when exposed to temperature changes or sunlight.

Some people with fifth disease may have pain and swelling in their joints (arthritis). This is more common among adults than children.

How is fifth disease spread?

Fifth disease is spread through contact with saliva or nose and throat droplets from an infected person or when an infected person sneezes or coughs. A person is most likely to spread the virus when they have cold-like symptoms before the rash appears. People with fifth disease are generally no longer contagious once the rash appears.

Pregnant women who have fifth disease can spread the virus to their babies. Babies whose mothers had fifth disease while pregnant usually do not have any problems, but serious complications can sometimes occur. Pregnant women who were exposed to someone with fifth disease or who think they might have fifth disease should talk to their health care provider.

Who is at risk for fifth disease?

School-aged children and pregnant women who are exposed to children at work or at home are at greatest risk for infection. However, pregnant women who have been in contact with a case of fifth disease during their infectious period have a relatively low potential risk for infection. Fifth disease is most common in elementary-aged students during the winter and spring months, although cases may occur year-round. A person can only be infected with the virus one time during his or her life.

People with weakened immune systems are at risk for serious complications from fifth disease. People with sickle cell anemia who get fifth disease are at greater risk for a sickle cell crisis, where red blood cells may fail to develop normally.

How do I know if I have fifth disease?

Your health care provider can diagnose fifth disease. Talk to your health care provider if you or your child develop symptoms of fifth disease.

How is fifth disease treated?

There is no specific treatment for fifth disease. For most people, fifth disease is a mild illness. Over-the-counter medication and cool compresses may reduce joint pain, fever, or other aches.

How is fifth disease prevented?

Good personal hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of human parvovirus. This includes frequent handwashing, covering coughs or sneezes, prompt disposal of used facial tissues, and avoiding others who are sick. Persons with sickle cell anemia, impaired immune system, or women who are pregnant should avoid cases of fifth disease. They should talk with their health care provider if they have been in contact with a case of fifth disease.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/parvovirusB19/fifth-disease.html>

This page was last reviewed June 21, 2019.